

UNITEHERE! at YALE

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**Testimony of Melissa Mason, Legislative Liaison, on Behalf of Robert Proto, International
Vice-President
UNITE HERE!
Public Safety and Security Committee
February 7, 2013**

Senator Hartley and Representative Dargan and members of the Public Safety and Security Committee, my name is Melissa Mason and I am a Legislative Liaison for UNITE HERE! located at 425 College Street in New Haven. I reside at 180 Fountain Street in New Haven.

I am here to testify on behalf of Robert Proto, International Vice-President of UNITE-HERE, in opposition to House Bill Number 5277 (An Act Legalizing and Regulating Mixed Martial Arts).

In the wake of the tragic mass shooting in Newtown, it is unthinkable that lawmakers in any jurisdiction would risk exposing our children to an activity that involves extreme violence and brutality.

Cage fighting, also known as "ultimate fighting" and "mixed martial arts," is sensationalized violence that has no place in civilized society. In these contests, fighters are allowed to *knock each other unconscious through elbows, kicks and knees to the head*¹; and to *strangle each other to the point of passing out through choke holds*². At least four cage fighters from the United States are reported to have died from injuries sustained during amateur or professional cage fights.³

We are also deeply concerned that cage fighters have competed in public stadiums and on television bearing Neo-Nazi messages in tattoos and on clothing.⁴

As recently as March 2012, a convicted sex offender with Neo-Nazi tattoos was allowed to compete in a nationally televised cage fighting event in Columbus, Ohio.⁵ In addition, an amateur cage fighter and white supremacist from Oregon last year allegedly went on a 10-day crime spree that spanned three states and included four murders. The fighter was charged with "targeting Jewish leaders, members of prominent Jewish organizations and other 'Zionists,' and using the media to publicize their movement in an attempt to spark a revolution."⁶

The Southern Poverty Law Center, a civil rights group, has warned of a disturbing connection between white supremacists and cage fighting. The Center wrote in a report:

*"Not surprisingly, this rapidly rising blood sport is likewise wildly popular among racist skinheads and other young extremists with a thirst for violence."*⁷

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Professional cage fighting organizations, such as the UFC, have thus far failed to adequately police the behavior of fighters. Prominent UFC fighters have joked about rape in public, and have made remarks that are demeaning towards women, gays and Latinos.

UFC fighter Quinton “Rampage” Jackson appeared in a disgusting online video in which he makes light of sexual assault by pretending to attempt to rape a woman in a parking garage using chloroform and zip ties.⁸ Even after a coalition of women’s groups, clergy and academics expressed outrage over Jackson’s behavior, and called for his removal from a cage fighting event in Chicago, the UFC allowed him to compete on national television.⁹

One prominent UFC fighter wrote on Twitter, “Rape is the new missionary,”¹⁰ while another UFC fighter wrote, “If a rape van was called a surprise van, more women wouldn’t mind going for rides in them.”¹¹ UFC president Dana White has set a despicable example by repeatedly using abusive language that is derogatory to women.¹²

These public displays of violence, hate and misogyny are all the more troubling in light of the fact that cage fighting is being actively marketed to children through toys, video games and clothing. Today, children as young as seven years old are participating in cage fighting tournaments and training in UFC gyms¹³. There are online videos showing children punching and kicking each other from behind chain-link fences, while adult spectators clap and cheer.¹⁴

Last year, the National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence wrote in a letter to New York state legislators opposing legalization of MMA in that state. The letter states that:

“Children, in particular, should not be exposed to homophobic, misogynistic and violent language that has been permitted by the UFC. ... This kind of hateful rhetoric is not acceptable in America, where we are teaching our children to respect those who are different and where we are working to stop bullying in our schools and communities.”¹

Why, in a state that just suffered the second-deadliest school shooting in history, would we even consider exposing our children to the violent misogyny and perverse forms of masculinity that are celebrated in the world of cage fighting?

We strongly urge you to protect our children from these violent spectacles and maintain the ban against cage fighting in Connecticut.

Thank you for your time and attention.

¹ NCDSV letter: http://www.ncdsv.org/images/NCDSV_NY_State_Assembly_Members_1-10-2012.pdf

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¹ UFC.com: <http://www.ufc.com/discover/fighter/skills/striking>

² UFC.com, "Ways To Win," <http://www.ufc.com/discover/sport/ways-to-win>; "YouTube video, "MMA Fighter Choked Unconscious, Ring Fever Exclusive," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CwDXuw4Mc4>; YouTube video, "Dustin Duffy Choked Unconscious in First Fight," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htTyxtdkerk>; YouTube video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHSY2PQ6ywo>; YouTube video, "Stranglehold – The Sickest MMA Chokes of All Time," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1aOw22f11Y>

³ Budllong, Jeff, "Sturgis man dies after MMA fight in Rapid City," May 30, 2012, *Rapid City Journal*, http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/local/communities/sturgis/sturgis-man-dies-after-mma-fight-in-rapid-city/article_d6bfb780-3c13-5482-84bf-7926f686772d.html; Lengerich, Ryan, "Fighter died from blunt force trauma, autopsy reveals," July 12, 2012, *Rapid City Journal*, http://rapidcityjournal.com/news/fighter-died-from-blunt-force-trauma-autopsy-reveals/article_1fb84d49-0ca8-51d7-a269-eb771a8b48be.html; Daily, Karen, "Autopsy confirms MMA fighter died from head injury in bout," June 29, 2010, *Aiken Standard*, <http://www.aikenstandard.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100629/AIK0101/306299982>; Botter, Jeremy, "Cause of death determined in case of Houston fighter Vasquez," April 7, 2008, *Houston Chronicle*, <http://blog.chron.com/fighting/2008/04/cause-of-death-determined-in-case-of-houston-fighter-vasquez/>; Sievert, Steve, "Mixed martial arts has 1st death with Houstonian," Dec. 3, 2007, *Houston Chronicle*, <http://www.chron.com/sports/article/Mixed-martial-arts-has-1st-death-with-Houstonian-1800986.php>; Botter, Jeremy, "Cause of death determined in case of Houston fighter Vasquez," April 7, 2008, *Houston Chronicle*, <http://blog.chron.com/fighting/2008/04/cause-of-death-determined-in-case-of-houston-fighter-vasquez/>; Associated Press, "American Dies in Ukraine During 'Ultimate Fighting,'" March 19, 1998, *Buffalo News*, <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P2-23029500.html>; Associated Press News Archive, "Man Dies After Ultimate Fight Match," March 19, 1998, <http://www.apnewsarchive.com/1998/Man-Dies-After-Ultimate-Fight-Match/id-abf4c3279aa3852fc64b934a40790862>

⁸ "Rampage Jackson — How to Pick Up a Gurl — Fast," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfG5amLtWEQ>

⁹ Hirst, Ellen Jean, "Video sparks protest of Ultimate Fighting event," Jan. 25, 2013, *Chicago Tribune*, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2013-01-25/news/ct-met-ufc-rape-video-20130125_1_ufc-fighter-lorenzo-fertitta-quinton-rampage-jackson; NBC 5 Chicago, "Groups Want UFC Star Booted for Racy Videos," Jan. 26, 2013, <http://www.nbcchicago.com/news/sports/ufc-chicago-quinton-rampage-jackson-rape-video-188462661.html>; Hill, Darlene, "Women's groups protest UFC's Quinton 'Rampage' Jackson," Jan. 25, 2013, *FOX 32 Chicago*, <http://www.myfoxchicago.com/story/20711189/womens-groups-protest-quinton-rampage-jackson>

¹⁰ Associated Press, "Group Criticizes UFC After Fighter's Rape Tweet," Nov. 12, 2012, CBS-Las Vegas, <http://lasvegas.cbslocal.com/2011/11/12/group-criticizes-ufc-after-fighters-rape-tweet/>

¹¹ McNeil, Franklin, "UFC fires Miguel Torres for tweet," Dec. 9, 2011, *ESPN.com*, http://espn.go.com/mma/story/_/id/7334939/ufc-releases-miguel-torres-rape-van-twitter-post

¹² Video (1:55 to 2:00), "UFC President Dana White's Notorious Rant," April 3, 2009, <http://www.blinkx.com/watch-video/ufc-president-dana-white-notorious-rant/FYZcYppmYJ5wwYruuKpvpw>; YouTube video (3:51 to 4:06), <http://www.youtube.com/embed/0Q8BeT77tVQ>

¹³ Keown, Tim, "The kid gloves come on," Dec. 25, 2012, *ESPN The Magazine*, http://espn.go.com/mma/story/_/id/8766646/future-mma-kids-crazy-rayfield-espn-magazine

¹⁴ Ibid.